

FROM FEAR TO LOVE Spiritual Grounding in Anxious Times

“Releasing Control, Embracing Humility”
July 30, 2022 | Meditation Part Three *with Marjorie Thompson*

In Support of Contemplative Prayer

I was one of the relatively rare few who also had it patterned into me that prayer was *listening* to God. This learning came through the good fortune of spending my first six school years in a Quaker school, where weekly silent “meeting for worship” was an invariable part of the rhythm of life. In that silence, as I gazed up at the sunlight sparkling through those high upper windows, or followed a secret tug drawing me down into my own heart, I began to know a prayer much deeper than “talking to God.” Somewhere in those depths of silence I came upon my first experiences of God as a loving presence that was always near, and prayer as a simple trust in that presence.

In Christian spiritual literature, [contemplative prayer] all too often has the aura of an advance and rarified form of prayer, mostly practiced by monks and mystics. But in essence, contemplative prayer is simply a wordless, trusting opening of self to the divine presence. Far from being advanced, it is about the simplest form of prayer there is. Children recognize it instantly. In fact, we never received any instruction on how to do it, because it was sensed among the Quakers to be so supremely *natural*.

Cynthia Bourgeault, *Centering Prayer and Inner Awakening* (4-5)

At the center of our being is a point of nothingness which is untouched by sin and illusion, a point of pure truth, a point or spark which belongs entirely to God, which is never at our disposal, from which God disposes of our lives, which is inaccessible to the fantasies of our own mind or the brutalities of our own will. This little point of nothingness and of absolute poverty is the pure glory of God written in us.... It is like a pure diamond blazing with the invisible light of heaven. It is in everybody ... the gate of heaven is everywhere.

Thomas Merton, *A Merton Reader* (347)

The divine indwelling is the cornerstone of contemplative prayer. Thomas Keating refers to it as “our personal big bang,” for it reveals the Source of our own being – the explosion of divine love into form which first gave rise to our personal life. It also reveals the direction in which our hearts must travel for a constantly renewed intimacy with this Source. As we enter contemplative prayer, we draw near the wellspring from which our being flows.

Cynthia Bourgeault, *Centering Prayer & Inner Awakening* (14)

Centering Prayer Summary

(Way of Prayer Appendix)

Centering Prayer is a method of contemplative prayer – a way of opening our whole being to the mystery of God beyond thoughts, words, and emotions. Contemplative prayer is a gift of the Spirit, not something we can make happen. Yet through grace we can open ourselves to God who we know by faith is within us, closer than breathing, closer than choosing, closer than consciousness itself.

Centering Prayer prepares us to receive this gift. It moves us beyond conversation with Christ to communion with Him. The focus is deepening our relationship with the living, Triune God.

Centering Prayer Guidelines

Choose a sacred word as the symbol of your intention to consent to God's presence and action within. Select this word in a brief period of prayer, asking the Spirit to inspire you. Examples: God, Jesus, Abba, Light, Love, Peace, Be Still, Trust, Faith, Yes.

Sitting comfortably with eyes closed, settle briefly and silently breathe your sacred word as the symbol of your consent to God's presence and action within. Introduce your word very gently, as if you were laying a feather on cotton. Let it carry into a sense of God's real presence.

When thoughts come, as they inevitably will, return ever-so-gently to the sacred word. "Thoughts" in this case include concepts, reflections, feelings, images, memories, plans, and sensory perceptions or body sensations. Do not try to push thoughts away, simply return your attention to the sacred word and God's presence within.

At the end of the prayer period (20 minutes), remain in silence with eyes closed for a few minutes. You might wish to say the Lord's Prayer.

Practical Points

Centering Prayer is not a technique but a way of cultivating a relationship with God. Recommended practice is two 20-minute periods daily.

It is not a substitute for other forms of prayer but offers a way of "resting in God."

We do not analyze or judge our experience; nor do we aim at specific goals like having no thoughts, feeling peaceful, repeating the sacred word continually, or achieving a spiritual experience.

The fruits of this prayer are experienced in daily life, not in the prayer period.

These guidelines are adapted from the Contemplative Outreach website,
www.centeringprayer.com/methodcp.htm

Kenosis and Contemplative Prayer

Paul uses the Greek word kenosis to describe Jesus' act of self-emptying and surrender. Contemplative prayer is a practice of self-emptying. At its most basic, contemplation is letting go—of habitual thoughts, preferences, judgments, and feelings. Though life itself is often our most powerful teacher through great love and suffering, contemplation is a daily, small death to false self and ego. It makes space for True Self to reappear, to rise from the ashes of our partial and protected self. If you do not already have a regular contemplative or meditative practice, I encourage you to begin with a few minutes of silence very day, emptying your mind of patterned—mostly negative—thoughts to simply be present to Presence.

Richard Rohr, *The Path of Descent* (adapted)

Disguises

We must not portray you in king's robes,
you drifting mist that brought forth the morning.

Once again from the old paint boxes
we take the same gold for scepter and crown
that has disguised you through the ages.

Piously we produce our images of you
till they stand around you like a thousand walls.
And when our hearts would simply open,
our fervent hands hide you.

- Rainer Maria Rilke, *Book of Hours: Love Poems to God* (I, 4)